

The Clothiers REPLY to the Dutch Interloper, and REASONS for a Hamburgh Company.

WHEN above Two Hundred of the most considerable Clothiers in *England* of the Counties of *Wilt* and *Gloucester*, (upon Consideration of the late Impolition of Guineas at exceeding advanc'd Prizes, Exaction of Measure, intolerable bad Debts, and full Trial of this Mercantile Affair) are Petitioning the Parliament to give all Incouragement to *English* Merchants to Export our Woollen-Manufactures to *Germany*, *Flanders*, and *Holland*; to find a *Dutch* Interloper in the Disguize of a Clothier, addressing himself to an *English* Parliament for an equal Liberty in the highest Part of our Commerce with the Native Subject; nay, impudently affirming, that there is no need of an *English* Merchant or *Hamburgh* Company; for that he is so much at *England's* Devotion, to take Care of that Part of our Merchandize, and spare us that Charge; is too manifest a piece of Flattery, to pass in a Kingdom enrich'd with so many valuable Benefits, and chiefly secur'd by Navigation.

He introduceth himself by way of Answer to a certain Paper, Intituled, *An Humble Representation of the State of our Woollen Manufactures*; and most readily concurs with the Representer, that our Woollen Manufactures are miserably debas'd, that the measures of Cloth ought to be regulated, and the goodness of our Manufactures kept to a Standard, and seems fairly to offer his Guardianship in these Particulars.

That we may not Split our Interest twice upon the same Rock; I will assert, First, That our Woollen Manufactures have been debas'd thro' the Management of these Interlopers; Commissions to lower the Price of Goods having been always sent over, which has forc'd the Maker to make his Goods worse to secure a living Profit. Extraordinary measure have been Exacted, which has occasioned extraordinary straining. And before the Year 1663. When this Trade was carried on by *English* Merchants, Cloth was kept to a good Making, and no way falsified.

But he desires that these wholesome Regulations may be Established by the Wisdom of the Parliament.

In the Third and Fourth Year of *Edward* the Sixth, when our Trade to these Parts was carried on by the Foreign Merchants of the *Still-yard*; and our Manufactures much debas'd: A Law was made for the true making of Cloth, and in this Law there was an Injunction upon every Clothier to make the Letter E. Crown'd upon each Cloth to shew the Reformation, whilst the Trade remain'd in the Hands of these Foreign Merchants. But the Nation at that Time was so far from receiving a Benefit from this Law, that our Manufactures became more debas'd.

In the Fifth and Sixth Year of this Reign, the Guardianship of our Woollen Manufactures was committed to the *Hamburgh* Company, and these Foreigners excluded; and a Law was made, in which there is this Clause; *That during the space of Two Years, the Letter E Crown'd, shall not be made into any Cloth, to distinguish the Bad Cloth from Good*; and the Clothing Trade flourish'd for many Years under their Management.

He tells us next. *If our Woollen Manufactures are not render'd Cheap at Foreign Markets, all Regulations will fail; and that the Hamburgh Company are the means to render them Dear.*

To suffer our Woollen Manufactures to be clogged with any unnecessary Charge, is doubtless Prejudicial; and during such Time, that this Trade was wholly carried on by the *Hamburgh* Company, there were no Factors or Wooll-Broggers, in which respect Cloth was render'd Cheaper abroad: But to perswade us, that it is our Interest to Sell our Woollen Manufactures Cheap to Foreigners, has in it more *Dutch* than *English*; the better Price through good Management the Merchant gets abroad, the better Price the Clothier receives for his Cloth, and the better Price the Grower gets for his Wooll.

But the having but one Seller of *Allom*, favours of Monopoly; and the *Hamburgh* Company has been, and would be if encouraged, the greatest Monopoly that has been known.

The *Hamburgh* Company in *Queen Elizabeth's* Reign consist'd of Four Thousand Members, each Member Trading with his own Stock, and their Regulations in Trade most agreeable to the Publick Good; they were limited unto Two Shipings a Year by a Law in the first Year of *Queen Elizabeth*; which was no way Prejudicial to the lesser Clothier, if the Wealthy Merchant put off his Buying, until the Shipping, he was sure to pay something the Dearer for Cloth, which occasioned constant Buying; so that in this regulated Company, consisting of so many Members, Trading with their own Stock, the Proof of a Monopoly is not so clear, as where there is but one Seller of *Allom*.

He tells us next, *That whilst the Trade was limited to the Hamburgh Company only, several Woollen Manufactures were set up at Liege, Viviers, Cologne, Silesia, &c. Which during, a free Trade have been discouraged.*

When these Woollen Manufactures have been actually set up, since the *Hamburgh* Company was invaded in their Rights, in the Year 1663. and very much increas'd at *Zell*, and *Hanover*, at *Duisburge*, and in several Places in *Holland* since the Revolution; as is well known to several Gentlemen and Merchants, who have Travell'd abroad.

He shews next, *That England reaps no Benefit, by the trifling and petty Immunities of the Hamburgh Company abroad.*

To enumerate the Priviledges which the *English* enjoy at *Hamburgh* would be tedious, where the *English* enjoy more Priviledges then the *Borghers* themselves. *Calice* in former Time was the great Mart for *English* Goods, which was Lost in the Reign of *Queen Mary*, to her great Grief and Sorrow; this Loss was in some measure made good by *Queen Elizabeth* in the Settlement of Trade upon these advantageous Terms at *Hamburgh* the Inlet of *Germany*, this being a Free Town bordering upon the Empire, *Denmark* and *Sweden*; if any Difference should happen between us and any of these Princes, it would no way Influence our Trade, and the Charge to maintain this Company is so small, that it is sufficiently Compensated by the Priviledges we enjoy at *Hamburgh* in the ease of Customs, &c.

But (says he) Experience shew'd that more Goods was Exported in three Years after the Free Trade, than in three Years before; That Merchants were discouraged from Trading to the height, from the Apprehensions of the Difficulties we were falling under at that Time, is not unlikely; a greater Consumption was occasioned by our Armies abroad, vast Quantities of Woollen Goods were sent thro' *Hamburgh* into *Italy* and other Parts, the lowness of the Exchange, and other temporary Reasons might be assigned for this increase, and I am sure that the Exportation is very low at present.

As to what is Asserted in the Third Article. *That the numbers of Buyers are increas'd, that the Clothiers Sell for ready Money, and at better Prizes than when the Trade was confin'd to the Hamburgh Company only, and Wooll one Third Part Dearer than it was at tht Time*; is contrary to plain Demonstration. When this Trade was carried on by the *Hamburgh* Company only before the Year 1663. *Cotswold* Wooll was currently Sold at Twenty Eight Shillings per Tod, the Cloth now Sold for Six Shillings per Yard was Sold for Eight, and the Clothier had more ready Money for Cloth in those Days, than now; all which is well in Memory, and can be proved; and the *Germans* came constantly down, and bought vast Quantities of our Goods at *Hamburgh*.

As to the Constitution of the Company which he complains of, if the Wisdom of this Parliament, by inspecting their Charter and By-Laws, can find out a more Effectual Way to secure the Trade to *English* Merchants, and make it more National, it would be grateful to the present Members, as well as those to be admitted.

The *Hamburgh* Company has been the Fence and Guard of the *English* Merchandize and Navigation between us and *Holland*, *Flanders*, and *Germany*, from the Eighth Year of *Henry* the Fourth, until the beginning of *King Charles* the Second; and upon a just compare between our numerous Flocks of Sheep in our spacious Downs, which afford such a variety of valuable Manufactures, our *Fullers Earth*, *Coperas*, *Allom*, peculiar Commodities to the Improvement of our Woollen Manufactures; our *Leather*, *Lead*, *Tin*, &c. and the frigid Enjoyments of the *Easterlings* there, can be no wonder at this struggle for a Free Trade.

The Reasons for a Hamburgh Company.

I. THE Plausible Argument for a Free Trade was, *That it would increase the number of Buyers*. Whereas Experience now demonstrates the contrary, and that we have only changed Hands, and got a *Dutch* Merchant instead of an *English*; nay the Trade for *Germany* and *Holland* as we are well informed, is fall'n into the Hands of very few Foreign Buyers.

II. *That hereby more Money would be brought into the Cloth-Trade*. When it is manifest, greater Credit has been given with Cloth to these Foreigners, then to *English* Merchants, and more Losses. A Stock of Cloth is now kept upon the Clothiers Hand to match Patterns, which was formerly kept by the *English* Merchant in his Ware-House abroad, which is another hardship upon the Maker.

III. *That the Consumption of English Cloth would hereby be increas'd abroad.*

The decay of our Trade, and general Complaints from all Clothing Parts, does Evidence the contrary: Our Woollen Manufactures are at this Time much debas'd, and vast Quantities of our Wooll Exported of late Years.

From all these Considerations it is humbly hoped, that the Wisdom of the Parliament will put the Guardianship of our Woollen Manufactures into the Hands of *English* Merchants, who must be the truest Friends to our *English* Interest.